DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 450 756 IR 058 012

AUTHOR Feria, Lourdes
TITLE ICT and Marketing Challenges in Latin American Libraries.
PUB DATE 2000-08-00
NOTE 7p.; In: IFLA Council and General Conference: Conference Proceedings (66th, Jerusalem, Israel, August 13-18, 2000); see IR 057 981.
AVAILABLE FROM For full text: http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla66/papers/038-110e.htm.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Libraries; Case Studies; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Information Technology; *Library Administration; *Library Development; Library Planning; Library Services; *Marketing; Strategic Planning; *Telecommunications; User Satisfaction (Information)
IDENTIFIERS Latin America; Mexico; Technology Role

ABSTRACT

Latin American libraries have experienced an important development in the last two decades. Telecommunications and Information Technologies (ITC) have been key elements in this process. There are leading institutions with remarkable programs; nevertheless it is necessary to design marketing strategies to improve their benefits. A case study based on the University of Colima (Mexico) library system is presented in order to analyze how ITC applications and marketing techniques have been harmoniously combined. Although every country in the region must find its own solutions, some ideas are presented to emphasize that marketing is not exclusively for businessmen. Marketing is the "science of strategy," and its main objective is client/user satisfaction. Libraries are encouraged to act enthusiastically on its applications. (Author/MES)

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ED 450 756

IFLANET Search Contacts
Annual Conference

66th IFLA Council and General Conference

Jerusalem, Israel, 13-18 August

Conference Proceedings

A.L. Van Wesemael

Code Number: 038-110-E
Division Number: VI
Professional Group: Management and Marketing - Part I
Joint Meeting with: Information Technology and Social Sciences Libraries
Meeting Number: 110
Simultaneous Interpretation: *Yes*

ICT and marketing challenges in Latin American Libraries

Lourdes Feria
University of Colima, Library & IT Division, Colima, Mexico
E-mail: lferia@ucol.mx

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Abstract

Latin American libraries have experienced an important development in the last two decades. Telecommunications and Information Technologies have been key elements in this process. There are leading institutions with remarkable programs, nevertheless it is necessary to design marketing strategies to improve their benefits. A case study based on a Mexican university library system is presented in order to analyze how ITC applications and marketing techniques have been harmoniously combined. Although every country in the region must find its own solutions, some ideas are presented to emphasize that marketing is not exclusively for businessmen. It is the "science of strategy," and its main objective is client (user) satisfaction, so we librarians are welcome to act enthusiastically on its applications.

IR058012

Paper

Overview

Talking about Latin America is talking about a group of countries which are very close to each other, not only geographically but also culturally speaking. Their libraries can be grouped in 4 different categories: libraries in large countries such as Brazil and Mexico, which have about 60% of the collections in the region,

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followed by medium-size countries, such as Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Venezuela, which usually share the same library developments as Mexico and Brazil. Finally, there are small countries that can be divided in two groups: countries with a healthy economy, such as Costa Rica and Uruguay, which have a good library development, and countries with more modest economies, such as Nicaragua, Haiti, Honduras and El Salvador, which rarely have academic or specialized libraries (Lau, 1995).

Estela Morales says that the library development is heterogeneous:

> "within each country there may be excellent services and access to the most sophisticated technology in some places [...] and even a total lack of basic library services in others. However, in general there has been considerable progress, as well as a increasing participation at the international level, where the region has established its own identity and shown it has its own approach and can find its own solutions." (Morales, 1998).

Information Technologies

Today technologies have changed our social and economic life. In the workplace methodologies change, people work home or in the web, with flexible timetables, and more and more virtual communities are emerging in different fields. The large increase of ICTs has supported the multiplicity of global networks. Today people say that the bandwidth is the universal remedy, or that it constitutes a new asset (Ferreiro, 1999), while we are heading, as Negroponte points out, to a new convergence of media.

But 95% of the PCs around the world are located in economically developed countries. USA and the CIS (Community of Independent States) engage with their satellites nearly all geostationary orbits, while the Third World occupies less than 10%. There are more than 6.8 million documents and 80 thousand companies available in the WWW, but 80% of the human race doesn't have access to the most basic telecommunication systems (Ford & Contreras, 1999).

> "The Latin American IT market represents 3% of the world market, but growth in Latin American is above the world average" (Callaos, 1999).

Although most Latin American countries have computer networks, there is still much to do in respect to databases and information generated by each place. As J. Soriano says, this turns out because

> "basically, most countries in the region have not designed policies to integrate two different worlds: the world of technicians who only know how to connect the cables, and the world of users who work with the information. We believe that in the future the next step in the information revolution will come from the potential offered by database developments and electronic edition" (Newsweek, 1995).

We must seriously reflect on the implications, relations and conflicts raised by the information-oriented processes in libraries. In the case of libraries, technologies have made their activities easier, and they have changed them. Among several applications today we want to mention the computing workshops in Mexican public libraries, CD-ROM edition by National Libraries, and the participation in the UNESCO's Memory of the World program. The university libraries

> "are often the best endowed in terms of budget, professioanl staff and

> technological infrastructure [...] they offer databases and catalogues on paper, CD-ROM, online or as Online Public Access Catalogues (OPACs) [...] they have been pioneers in the integration and individual development of technologies that have brought users into contact with information either on site or around the world by means of telecommunications, particularly the Internet..." (Morales, 1998)

leading to new initiatives for the integration of Latin American cooperative networks, specially the RedHUCyt (Red Hemisférica Inter-Universitaria de Información Científica y Tecnológica) (Callaos, 1999). Technology has also been a key factor for integration and interaction in the region, and significant efforts have been made by international organizations such as the OAS and the UNESCO, through its Information for Latin America and the Caribbean Cooperative Program (INFOLAC), while the IFLA and the FID have also

> "helped to bring Latin American and Caribbean librarianship into the global economic and information system" (Morales, 1998).

Challenges and Strategies: the marketing role in libraries

> "Libraries in Latin America and the Caribbean have sought to adapt to new technological developments, while their efforts have been concentrated on meeting local needs. Traditionally, however, cooperation initiatives, which are a top priority for modern information services, have been few and far between" (Callaos, 1999).

The extraordinary growth in the use of Internet has definitely improved the cooperation among libraries in these countries. In respect to Internet, Gazitúa (1997) asserts that the technological environment shows how almost all restrictions have been overcome, and that

> "the main responsibility to advance relies on the information agents rather than with technologies" (Callaos, 1999).

Therefore, reworking our profession to meet the ICTs becomes an urgent issue, giving us the chance to extend the traditional territories from the community library to the global information services, from the territorial library to the virtual library, or a combination thereof (Ferreiro, 1999).

> "Social institutions today [including libraries] look vastly different than they did twenty years ago. A variety of forces, most specifically economic changes and technological developments, have reshaped and redefined our notions..." (Cfr. SHAPIRO, 1981 & BESSER, 1998).

Shall we resign to stay in the past? Or are we channeling our efforts to work on specific actions and confront challenges? (Ferreiro, 1999)

- How can we conform mission to technology?
- How can we identify the proper and irreplaceable items of a Library?
- How can we build a strong identity?
- How can we benefit from the "time-space" liberty concept in services?
- How shall we use networks?
- How can we create exciting products and services?
- How can we expand the market?
- How can we develop networks (Internet or Intranet) with primary relation groups?
- How can we speak the same IP language?

- How can we incorporate information?
- Increase the Spanish offering
- Improve the recovery of Spanish expressions (idioms, authorities, thesaurus)
- How shall we face the concentration of digitalized information by large transnational consortiums which have sophisticated recovery mechanisms?

The Latin American region requires specific solutions, and its strengths are the common cultural and language elements leveraged by marketing. Marketing is not only a practice for businessman, it is the "science of strategy" whose main objective is client (user) satisfaction, and we librarians shall know it and apply it as part of our permanent activities in the management and planning processes.

Strategic planning plays a primary role in all these processes: the analysis of Strengths - Weaknesses - Threats - Opportunities, the identification of CSF (Critical Success Factors), and the generation of strategic projects, as well as other elements proposed by Irene Wormell (1996):

- Vision (aim) Where do we want to be?
- Values (beliefs) How do we want to do things?
- Mission (purpose) What is our core business? Who are our customers?
- Objectives (functions) Why are we here? What shall we do?
- Main lines (assurances) What are the results from FDOA/FBE?
- Goals (action lines) Where are we going to?
- Tactics (actions) How are we going to do it?

By putting into practice all these tools we will have the chance to generate new products. Identifying key areas, and evaluating needs through primary strategic group sessions. Among other methods there is the creation of customer and supplier data banks, advertisement, and something very important: our staff, since the main good of a marketable information service are the people who work in it. Promotions and advertisement are part of the success in product marketing, but there are other elements, such as customer satisfaction, the ability to keep customers, and close businesses repeatedly. (Wormell, 1996)

Other authors propose as a complement the development of a corporate image, working in the identification of markets, structuring distribution and promotional systems. In Latin America, we shall mention two additional factors: the generation of results, though small at the beginning, may be a very useful strategy, and a good element to attract the attention of those who make decisions; and the development of alternative actions taking advantage of the creativity of people who work in projects (Feria, 1997).

Case Study: the University of Colima

Countries with a poor infrastructure shall not be limited by their own access to technology resources: what can be done in the Latin American countries to stop this disposition is more than evident… and not only to expand the internal use of information, but also to produce and export information goods.

An example of this is the ICT group, born from a library project in a Mexican university, which has brought together technological applications and significant marketing practices. This group currently works out four programs: the Compact Disc Editing Center, the Educational Multimedia Center, Telematic Services, and Libraries. The project started in 1983. At that time there was much to be done: we didn't have enough personnel, nor financial resources, nor even technology. It was a great challenge. The first step was the creation of a libraries

university system: we worked on the services and technical issues. At the beginning we had to recondition classrooms and laboratories; but little by little expressly designed facilities were built.

From its conception, the need to systemize information led us to the development of a computerized program to catalogue and manage libraries, currently known as SIABUC: Integral Automated Library System. Even though it was initially conceived as an internal tool, it is actually used by approximately 500 libraries in Mexico and Latin America. In fact, SIABUC was our access key to computer technology, which give us the chance to start an uninterrupted IT development.

In 1988, the intent to produce for the first time a CD-ROM totally edited by the University of Colima led to the creation of the Cenedic (Compact Disc National Editing Center). From that day on, the production has increased to one CD-ROM every two weeks. But its most important achievement has been the development of new processing and programming methodologies and applications.

After that, the Educational Multimedia Center was established. In this center the latest hypertext, hypermedia, animation and virtual reality techniques are adapted to produce didactic and interactive materials to support education-learning processes. On the other hand, the General Telematic Services Direction has undertaken the installation of a university network to offer distinct support services such as connectivity, access, university web site maintenance, etc. It works in linking programs with private companies. It has highly-trained personnel working on the latest network, data communication, Internet and videoconference developments. In recognition to its achievements, this institution has been recently invited to take part in the Internet2 project.

In addition, the ICT group is working on three projects for the implementation of Digital Libraries: The Digital Library for Latin America and The Caribbean, The Twenty First-Century Library, and Interfaces: Digital Library International Forum.

All this shows that the success achieved by librarians within a corporate environment depends directly on

> "our ability to perform that function for which we uniquely suited and trained; an that function is the management of information" (Echelman, 1981).

Information services, rather than becoming computer centers, will lead us to rethink the library. They will help us to give an added value to the traditional services, without mistakenly thinking, as some people do, that networks will replace books.

Conclusion

The library development in Latin America is both distinctive and heterogeneous; however, a significant development has been evident in the last two decades. A critical element has been the outstanding development of telecommunications and information technologies. From the 80's the automation of libraries has received a great impulse, and many libraries have introduced more and more equipment and applications, creating their own web sites, generating compact discs, and producing leading projects for some countries in the region. It has provided them with a more refreshing and distinctive touch, giving us the opportunity to conceive new directions (Ferreiro, 1999), such as:

- Increasing the Spanish language offerings in Internet
- Creating Latin American networks for the creation of contents
- Negotiating with consortiums
- Collaborating and contending
- The Library Brand as an Internet offering validator
- The Library as an educational actor
- Technological developer
- Learning on Information Resources
- Integrator of information services
- Information organizer for the www
- Aggressive disclosure of information
- Broker, Specialized Searcher
- Entertainer/ Network, Communities Moderator
- Contents mapping

Finally, it is not worthless to say that every activity requires from the beginning a great deal of perseverance, will and passion. The work done by the information services is an enterprise that requires commitment, and a good disposition to devote time, consideration and love to all these activities, and to become part of the change, delivering and communicating this attitude, converting ordinary things into extraordinary achievements.

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Latest Revision: *May 12, 2000*

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